

## ANOTHER COMPANION TO PLUTARCH

TITCHENER (F. B.), ZADOROJNYI (A. V.) (edd.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plutarch*. Pp. x + 502, ills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Paper, £29.99, US\$39.99 (Cased, £89.99, US \$120). ISBN: 978-0-521-17656-9 (978-0-521-76622-7 hbk).

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I first heard about this edited volume as an Oxford graduate student embarking upon my doctoral studies back in 2008. It was then in the making, and I still remember the excitement among fellow Plutarchists about what sounded like a truly novel project. Published 15 years later, it now provides a valuable entry-point into the multifaceted personality and work of Plutarch of Chaeronea. It furnishes the newcomer with solid knowledge on the typical topics pertaining to the ancient author's world view and writing practice. These may be helpfully divided into three main strands, though they are not listed according to these divisions in the book's table of contents: (i) aim, method and core themes of Plutarch's biographies (Chapters 1, 2, 9, 10, 12, 13), (ii) Plutarch's role as writer, thinker and philosopher (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14) and (iii) his rich afterlife (Chapters 15–19) (with some allowance for interchangeability of contents in groups (i) and (ii)).

The introduction initiates readers into the basics of Plutarch's life and context. This is not the scholarly introduction one would normally expect: it is too brief and is not sufficiently or representatively referenced. Footnotes are populated by references to the main chapters with their titles given in full, whereas they could have easily been inserted into the main text in parentheses, citing only the chapter numbers. The only verbatim quote in the introduction's footnotes that comes from recent secondary literature on Plutarch is an unexpectedly long citation from a chapter by one of the editors, which does not back up the statement to which it refers in the main text with relevant evidence, but rather reformulates it in other phraseology (p. 1 n. 2). The introduction glosses over or entirely omits the latest trends in Plutarchan studies (e.g. memory, knowledge ordering, aesthetics, time and topography) in favour of more traditional – not to say obsolete – ones (cluster theory, humour, theatricality, drama and tragedy, Plutarch's corpus as a macrotext). Its strong point is that it offers an engaging, relaxed reading of Plutarch for the total beginner, perhaps even the non-Classicalist, but one is left wondering whether its overall form fits the agenda of the ensuing chapters, which are dedicated to offering updated, vigorous introductions to individual topics. The editors' lack of explanation for why the chapters come in the order that they do is also an issue, since the coherence of the volume is left unsubstantiated. As indicated above, at least for this reviewer, the book's structure – apart from the last five chapters, which are arranged thematically, and chronologically within their unifying theme – is not the ideal one for an introductory Companion of this sort.

Turning to the book's main core, all nineteen studies that make up the volume are learned, stimulating and professional, and their different natures aside – ranging from the descriptive to the interpretative, from the informative to the argumentative – overall meet the highest standards of scholarship. The impression they give is one of reassurance regarding each author's expertise in their respective area. The book begins with C. Pelling's chapter on Plutarch and biography. No other chapter in the volume could have made a better start, because it succeeds in speaking to the non-expert through its erudition, clarity and – no less important – immediacy. By weighing the key features of Plutarchan biography against the ten rules of the modern genre of literary biography as set out by H. Lee's 2009 book *Biography*, Pelling sensitises modern readers to how

Plutarch's biography might have looked to readers in ancient times. Similar virtues in terms of content and style feature in T. Duff's chapter (Chapter 3) dealing with Plutarch's role as a moral and political educator. The different sections of this chapter, clearly indicated and marked from the start, enable easy navigation through the argument and give a lucid overview of Plutarch's moral and political thinking in the light of both the *Lives* and the *Moralia*. Chapter 2 by M. Tröster explores Plutarch's concepts of Greekness and Romanness, bringing out especially the importance of the biographical subject's moral qualities in revealing Plutarch's notions of *paideia* and Hellenism. As such it would fit better with Chapter 9, 'Plutarch and Classical Greece'; indeed a transposition of Chapter 2 to just before or after Chapter 9 would also help retain the thematic cohesion between Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 (alternatively, Chapter 10 on leadership in the *Lives* would have sat nicely just after Chapter 1, in place of what is now Chapter 2). Chapter 4 by J. Opsomer is an articulate discussion of Plutarch's Platonic affiliations, which emphasises both continuities and discontinuities in respect of Plutarch's doctrinal and practical philosophy. Chapter 5 by J. Dillon and Zadorojnyi examines the polemical features of Plutarch's criticism of historians, poets and philosophers, notably the Stoics, while Chapter 6 by R. Lamberton delves into Plutarch's varied and complex attitudes to religion and myth. Chapter 7 by K. Oikonomopoulou offers an exploration of conviviality and symbolism, knowledge and education in Plutarch's sympotic works. Chapter 8 by the late D. Russell is a meticulous study of Plutarch's language, prose and rhetoric, stressing the need for more work in this neglected area of study. Chapter 9 by the late P. Stadter surveys Plutarch's approach to the classical past in the context of his own era, suggesting that the former enabled Plutarch to harness the value of Greek history, art, tradition and moral examples to the benefit of his readers. Chapter 10 by M. Beck offers a stimulating account of Plutarch's understanding of leadership as a concept informed by moral greatness. Chapter 11 by the late F. Frazier focuses on Plutarch's notions of gender, sexuality and family in a wide range of sources. Chapter 12 by Pelling discusses the multifaceted presentation of wealth in the *Lives* and its relationship with moral decay, and Chapter 13 by E. Almagor highlights Plutarch's creative transformation of the cultural and rhetorical *topos* of the *barbaros*. Chapter 14 by J. Mossman and Zadorojnyi is a well-researched study of Plutarch's approach to animals, mainly their role as vehicles for negotiating human nature. Finally, Chapters 15–19 are informative treatments of Plutarch's reception in specific historical periods (in Byzantium, Chapter 15 by N. Humble; in the Italian Renaissance, Chapter 16 by M. Pade; in the Spanish Renaissance, Chapter 17 by A. Pérez Jiménez; in sixteenth- to eighteenth-century France, Chapter 19 by K. MacDonald) or individual authors (Shakespeare, Chapter 18 by J. Griffin).

Despite the admittedly fine scholarship of the contributions assembled in the volume, with a few exceptions, there is hardly anything here that is not already covered by M. Beck's Blackwell *A Companion to Plutarch* (2014) (abbreviated using its editor's initial as B), and by the 2019 *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plutarch* (edd. by S. Xenophontos and K. Oikonomopoulou) (abbreviated as XO) as far as the material in the reception essays (Chapters 15–19) is concerned. (The exception in terms of a study that does present new material is perhaps Chapter 12 on wealth and decay, though this is admittedly not a mainstream topic in Plutarch's writings deserving a separate treatment within such a small-scale introduction to Plutarch, consisting of only fourteen chapters fundamentally devoted to the standard themes and features of the Plutarchan corpus.) Many of the chapters in the *Cambridge Companion to Plutarch* (abbreviated as TZ) bear the same titles and/or treat the same topics as B ('Religion and Myth' B = Religion and Myth in Plutarch' TZ; 'Plutarch and Platonism' B ≈ 'In the Spirit of Plato' TZ;

'Practical Ethics' B + 'Political Philosophy' B  $\approx$  'Plutarch As Moral and Political Educator' TZ; 'The Sympotic Works' B  $\approx$  'Plutarch at the Symposium' TZ; 'Language and Value in Plutarch' B  $\approx$  'Language, Style, and Rhetoric' TZ). Discussions of gender, sex, sexuality, politics and animals in Plutarch in TZ also echo those already featuring in B, while as far as the reception chapters go, the degree of overlap between TZ and its two predecessors B and XO is even greater: for example the essay on Plutarch's reception in Byzantium in TZ is in effect a succinct overview of Part 2 of XO, comprising Chapters 6 to 20, while Plutarch's reception in Italy, Spain, France and Shakespeare in TZ are again dealt with in B, XO or both, to a greater or lesser extent. The chapters on the Italian Renaissance and the Spanish Renaissance were written by the same authors in the B and TZ volumes: it should be acknowledged that conscientious attempts have been made to avoid duplication of material and wording, though this has not always been possible (e.g. in Pade's chapter).

Overall, when taken in isolation, the *Cambridge Companion to Plutarch* is an excellent piece of scholarship, but, as in life so too in academia, things are hardly ever seen in isolation. Though the *Cambridge Companion to Plutarch* is the more recent publication, it is likely to be eclipsed by Beck's *Companion* of 2014, which stands a better chance of remaining the major reference work for scholars and students of Plutarch by virtue of its broader coverage, more effective organisation and fresher approach. Those 'frustrating delays' noted by the editors in their acknowledgments section (p. x) are no doubt one reason for this state of affairs.

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